

## Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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R 211145Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9692

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3545

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MARONITES

1. THE MORE I REFLECT ON THE CURRENT STATE OF CRITICISMS OF THE DAMASCUS ACCORD COMING FROM MARONITES, THE MORE ESSENTIAL IT SEEMS FOR ME TO TALK TO THE MARONITE LEADERS AGAIN QUICKLY. WE MUST TRY AND KEEP THEM MOVING ON THE TRACK THAT HAS BEEN SET UP TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT. THEIR CRITICISMS SEEMED AT FIRST TO BE A PASSING DIFFICULTY, BUT THEY ARE SNOWBALLING IN IMPORTANCE, ESPECIALLY IF TODAY'S NEWS IS TRUE CONCERNING FRANGIE'S NEW CONDITIONS FOR SIGNING THE AMENDMENT. THE MARONITE STALLING THAT RESULTS CREATES YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A CLASSIC PHENOMENON OF THIS CRISIS: THE TENDENCY OF POLITICAL DELAY TO SPAWN A SECURITY BREAKDOWN. THE CENTRIFUGAL FORCES ARE TOO STRONG, THE PASSIONS TOO INTENSE, THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR

INCIDENTS TOO NUMEROUS, AND THE MEDDLERS BOTH INTERNAL AND FOREIGN TOO READILY AT HAND TO BE CONTAINED BY ANYTHING BUT UNRELENTING POLITICAL PROGRESS. EVEN AT BEST IT'S TOUCH AND GO.

2. ADMITTEDLY, THE MARONITE COMPLAINT ABOUT THE DAMASCUS AGREEMENT HAS SOME LOGIC TO IT. IT IS INDEED GALLING TO SEE TWO NON-LEBANESE PARTIES SERMONIZING ABOUT LEBANESE POLICY. THE CHRISTIAN EMOTIONS ON THIS SORT OF THING ARE UNDERSTANDABLE. YET I CAN'T HELP THINKING THERE IS A CONTRIVED ASPECT TO THEIR ANGER. THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY COMPLAINED THAT SYRIA COULD NOT GET THE LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIANS TO GO ALONG WITH THE SYRIAN PROGRAM, AND NOW WHEN SYRIA ACTS TO RECONCILE ITSELF WITH THE LEFT THROUGH THE PALESTINIANS, THE

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MARONITES SUDDENLY CRY ALARM. DID THEY REALLY EXPECT THAT THIS

WOULD BE DONE WITHOUT FURTHER TARNISHING LEBANON'S ALREADY BEDRAGGLED SOVEREIGNTY? MOREOVER, THEIR SUDDEN REALIZATION THAT THE PALESTINIANS WILL PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE PEACEKEEPING DOESN'T RING TRUE. THE PALESTINIANS HAD A ROLE IN THE PREVIOUS JOINT COMMITTEE ALSO. ALL THAT'S CHANGED IS THAT THE PALESTINIANS ARE NOW STRONGER AND THE LEBANESE ARMY SHATTERED--MAJOR CHANGES, TO BE SURE, BUT CERTAINLY NO SURPRISE AT THIS STAGE. I HAVE A FEELING THAT AN ULTERIOR PURPOSE LIES PARTLY BEHIND THE MARONITE COMPLAINT, DERIVED EITHER FROM NEW PROMISES OF SUPPORT BY SOME OUTSIDE PARTY OR FROM THE CONTINUING BELIEF WHICH CHAMOUN HAS THAT HE CAN FORCE AN INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CRISIS JUST BY MAKING IT WORSE.

3. IF I DO SEE THE MARONITE LEADERS, WHAT SHOULD I SAY? SOME OF THE POINTS OUTLINED ABOVE COULD BE PUT TO THEM, THOUGH, OF COURSE, ON A FRIENDLY BASIS AND WITHOUT ALLEGING ULTERIOR MOTIVES. I COULD ALSO SAY THAT THE CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE TO ENDORSE ALL THE POINTS IN THE DAMASCUS ACCORD IF THEY DON'T WANT TO--IT WAS, AFTER ALL, A JOINT STATEMENT OF OPINION BY TWO INTERESTED PARTIES AND NOT A BINDING ENGAGEMENT OF ALL PARTIES--BUT THE CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT USE SUCH DISAGREEMENT AS AN OCCASION TO STALL THE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT PROCESS. THAT PROCESS IS OF PRIMORDIAL IMPORTANCE. (A SOMEWHAT MODERATED STATEMENT ON THE DAMASCUS ACCORD MADE BY CHAMOUN YESTERDAY IS HELPFUL HERE.) ABOVE ALL, THE PROCESS IS BENEFICIAL PARTICULARLY TO CHRISTIAN INTERESTS, FOR CONTINUED FIGHTING WILL PROBABLY JUST WORSEN THEIR POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE LEFT AND THE PALESTINIANS, NOT THE REVERSE. THE MARONITES WILL HAVE TO SWALLOW A BIT OF PRIDE ABOUT LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY FOR A WHILE. THE VERY AIM OF THE SETTLEMENT IS TO GET A PROCESS MOVING THAT WILL RESTORE LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY EVENTUALLY. BY SNIPING AT THE SETTLEMENT, THEY MERELY DELAY THE DAY WHEN LEBANON CAN HOLD ITS HEAD HIGH AGAIN.

4. ON THE PALESTINIANS IN PARTICULAR, I PROPOSE TO DRIVE HOME TO THE MARONITES THAT THE MOST THEY CAN HOPE FOR UNTIL THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE ENDS IS A MODUS VIVENDI, NOT A REAL SOLUTION. CRIES OF ALARM ABOUT PALESTINIAN INFRINGEMENT OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY ARE THEREFORE A BIT OUT OF PLACE AS LONG AS A GENERALLY WORKABLE ARRANGEMENT IS REACHED. IF ONE MAKES ALLOWANCES FOR FLAWS IN THIS IMPERFECT WORLD, IT IS NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT THE SYRIANS WILL "ENFORCE" THE CAIRO AGREEMENT AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS.

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5. ONE FURTHER POINT RELATING TO THE URGENCY OF THE MATTER: MAY 2 IS THE DATE WHEN THE REGULAR MANDATE OF PARLIAMENT ENDS AND THE EXTENDED MANDATE BEGINS. IN THE EXCESSIVE LEGALISM OFTEN USED BY POLITICIANS HERE, IT IS WIDELY FELT THAT A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HELD AFTER THAT DATE WILL BE LESS "LEGAL" THAN ONE HELD BEFORE. WHETHER VALID OR NOT, THIS VIEW COULD ALWAYS BE USED AS A POLITICAL CLUB AGAINST THE NEW PRESIDENT.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, SOVEREIGNTY, SECURITY, PALESTINIANS, CHRISTIANS, INSTRUCTIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, DISSIDENT FACTIONS, POLITICAL LEADERS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, PROGRESS REPORTS, CAT-B  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 21 APR 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** vogelfj  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976BEIRUT03545  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** P850108-2334  
**From:** BEIRUT  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1976/newtext/t19760441/aaaabidf.tel  
**Line Count:** 115  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION NODS  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** NODIS  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** NODIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** vogelfj  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 08 JUN 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <08 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <18 OCT 2004 by vogelfj>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MARONITES  
**TAGS:** PINS, PINT, LE, SY, MARONITES, (BROWN, L DEAN)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006